



CITY NEWS

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DATE: December 22, 2005
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**** Media Advisory ****

Police and City Council Remind Citizens to Celebrate New Year Safely

Thanks to a collaborative community effort, no Wichita resident or visitor has ever died as a result of celebratory gunfire. This collaborative effort is known as Celebrate Safely and is a project that has been strongly endorsed by City Council Member Sharon Fearey for several years.

While other communities have experienced tragic deaths due to celebratory gunfire, Wichitans have remained safe on New Year's Eve, with the number of shots fired reports decreasing each year.

"It can sometimes be difficult to keep the momentum going on a project when a community hasn't experienced any tragedies, but where Celebrate Safely is concerned, the absence of tragedy is exactly what has motivated us to continue with this important prevention message," said Council Member Fearey.

Volunteers from the Wichita Police Department and several other organizations will meet at 2 p.m. on Thursday, December 29, at the Evergreen Neighborhood City

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Hall at 2700 N. Woodland. Council Member Fearey and members of the Wichita Police Department will be available for questions, and a City Proclamation will be read.

Representatives from several organizations will then canvas North Wichita passing out flyers in both English and Spanish educating citizens on the dangers of celebratory gunfire.

“Not only is celebratory gunfire dangerous, but it is also illegal,” said Sgt. Santiago Hungria, Patrol North Supervisor. “We will be passing out flyers with information and visiting with all the citizens we come in contact with.”

According to Sgt. Hungria, discharging a firearm into the air is a serious crime punishable by fines and up to a year in jail. (City of Wichita Ordinance 5.88.020) He went on to say that bullets can travel up to 2½ miles and fall with 50 percent of the force with which they discharged.

“Falling bullets kill and injure people across the United States every year. And not only do they injure people, but they can also cause extensive property damage,” said Sgt. Hungria.

Other supporters of Celebrate Safely include: Interfaith Ministries GoZones, the National Latino Police Officers Association of Wichita Sedgwick County Chapter, KYQQ Radio, Wichita Independent Neighborhoods, Weed and Seed, El Pueblo Neighborhood Association, Historic Midtown Neighborhood Association, North Riverside Neighborhood Association, Riverside Citizens Association and the Kansas Army National Guard.

Council Member Fearey believes that the Celebrate Safely message is an important one, and she hopes public attention to the problem will increase peer pressure from potential shooter’s friends and relatives. “Our efforts could lead to someone convincing a friend or loved on to ‘put the gun down,’” she said.

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Four years ago, Phoenix, Arizona, enacted Shannon's Law, in memory of 14-year-old Shannon Smith, who was killed by a stray bullet in 1999 while talking on the phone in the back yard. The law makes it a felony to fire a gun into the air within the city limits, yet in 2003, there were still 95 cases of random gunfire successfully prosecuted in the city of Phoenix.

In Puerto Rico, where such celebratory actions are common, it is estimated that approximately two persons are killed and 25 injured each year by celebratory gunfire, according to the Center for Disease Control.

For more information on Celebrate Safely, please contact Capt. Felecia Norris or Sgt. Santiago Hungria at the Patrol North Bureau at 688-9500.